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## Conservative and progressive individuals

Tanja Säily

This chapter summarises our research on individual outliers, looking for patterns in their behaviour. Are individuals consistently conservative or progressive across changes, or is there variation here as well? Does the nature and stage of the change influence their behaviour? What about the social background of the individuals?

### 14.1 Definition of outlier

First we need to look into how outliers are defined in each individual chapter. Because each change is different in terms of e.g. stage and social meaning, there is variation in what constitutes an outlier.

For **changes nearing completion**, we can often only analyse conservative users as almost everyone else has switched to the incoming variant. In the case of the very infrequent *thou* (Chapter 6), practically anyone who uses it counts as a conservative individual, although the meaning of ‘conservative’ is debatable as the functions of *thou* changed in the 18th century. For verbal *-s* (Chapter 7), conservatives are defined more strictly as those who use 10% or less of the incoming forms *has*, *does* or *says*, and who have a minimum of six instances of the variable. In the case of affirmative *DO* (Chapter 8), which lacks a linguistic variable, individuals from whom there is enough data are compared with the corpus as a whole using permutation testing (see 5.3.2 above). Here, too, the meaning of ‘conservative’ is debatable: while Hester Piozzi uses *DO* a great deal at the end of the 18th century, she does so in a new way, as an early adopter of emphatic *DO*. Finally, for the outgoing indefinite pronouns (Chapter 9), conservatives are defined as those individuals whose use of the recessive variants exceeds 50%.

For **mid-range changes**, both progressive and conservative individuals can often be identified. In the case of *its* (Chapter 10), conservatives use *its* less frequently and progressives more frequently than the period average. Outliers in the use of the increasingly productive *-ity* (Chapter 12) are defined as individuals who differ significantly from the corpus as a whole in terms of permutation testing. As for the

**incipient** progressive aspect (Chapter 11), progressive users are identified by comparing individuals with the corpus as a whole using both normalised frequencies and permutation testing. In the case of the incoming indefinite pronouns *-body* and *-one* (Chapter 9), progressive users are defined as those who have at least ten instances of indefinites and whose use of the variant in question exceeds 50% (for *-body*, the period covered is up to 1759 as its increase had stalled by that point).

## 14.2 Analysis

Individuals who are outliers in terms of more than one change are listed in Table 14.1. Most people are not outliers in terms of multiple changes. Looking at the outliers who are consistently conservative across changes (their names and social metadata are shaded with light grey in the table), we can see that a disproportionate number of them seem to be clergymen. This could be due to their close association with archaic biblical language in their work. Otherwise the distribution of social ranks and genders more or less reflects that of the corpus as a whole. However, the middle rank of professionals is overrepresented among the outliers who are progressive in terms of at least one change, which supports Labov's (2001: 259) hypothesis of a curvilinear pattern of language change.

Based on previous research (e.g. Nevalainen et al. 2011), we might also hypothesise that social aspirers would be more conservative than others, especially with regard to incipient and mid-range changes (cf. Table 14.3), where the incoming form might not yet have established a positive social value and was thus better avoided by someone who wished to be accepted by the upper echelons of society. This, however, is not borne out by our data as there are both upwardly and downwardly mobile conservative users, as well as those whose social status remains static. On the other hand, the four consistently progressive users (indicated in boldface in Table 14.1) are united by their lack of social mobility as none of them cross the line between gentry and non-gentry. Most of them are professionals, and even though Elizabeth Carter was a clergyman's daughter, she too moved in the same literary circles as the others as a poet, writer and translator. It thus seems that the most progressive users were firmly placed among professionals.

Table 14.1 also shows that individuals may change their outlier status during their lifetime, which can be regarded as another aspect of lifespan change in language use. Physician Erasmus Darwin is among the progressives in the use of *its* earlier in his life but later starts lagging behind, becoming consistently conservative in terms of both *its* and *-ity*. Not only does he lag behind in the communal increase, but the proportion of *its* in his letters actually decreases from the first period to the next, as shown in Chapter 10 above. Conservatism may thus increase with age, to the point of "retrograde change" (Wagner & Sankoff 2011: 304–305).

**Table 14.1** Individuals who are outliers in terms of two or more of the changes studied, sorted by gender and period.\*

Outlier		Change									
Period	Name	Gender	Rank	Social mobility	<i>thou</i>	verbal -s	do	indefinites	<i>its</i>	progressive aspect	-ity
1700–1719	Isabella Wentworth	F	N	U				C	P		
1700–1739	Ann Clavinger	F	GL	N				C			C
1700–1779	Mary Wortley Montagu	F	N	N			P	P: <i>-body</i>	C		
1720–1800	Elizabeth Carter	F	CL	N				P: <i>-body</i>	P		
1740–1779	Elizabeth Draper	F	P	U					C		P
1760–1800	Frances Burney Sarah	F	P	N				P: <i>-one</i>	P		
1760–1800	Lennox	F	N	N					C	(P: p.pass.)	C
1760–1800	Hester Piozzi	F	GL	N	C		C		P		
1760–1800	Mary Wollstonecraft	F	P	D					C	P	
1780–1800	Elizabeth Clift	F	O	N				P: <i>-one</i>		P	C
1680–1699	Daniel Fleming	M	GU	U		C		C			C
1680–1699	Philip Henry	M	CL	N		C		C			
1680–1699	John Pinney	M	CL	?		C		C			C
1680–1719	Henry Fleming	M	CL	D				(C but early)			C
1680–1719	John Evelyn Samuel	M	GL	N				C	P		
1680–1719	Pepys Humphrey	M	P	U				P: <i>-body</i>	C		C
1680–1739	Prideaux Humfrey	M	CU	U		C		P: <i>-one</i>	P		
1680–1739	Wanley Henry	M	P	N			C	C	P		C
1700–1719	Liddell	M	GL	N					P		C
1700–1739	Daniel Defoe	M	P	N				C	C		C
1700–1739	John Gay	M	P	D		C		P: <i>-body</i>			

(continued)

Table 14.1 (*continued*)

Outlier		Change									
Period	Name	Gender	Rank	Social mobility	<i>thou</i>	verbal -s	DO	indefinites	<i>its</i>	progressive aspect	-ity
1720–1759	Francis Blomefield	M	CL	D		C		C			
1720–1759	Charles Lennox	M	N	N				P: <i>-body</i>			C
1720–1759	Thomas Pelham-Holles	M	N	N				P: <i>-body</i>			C
1720–1779	David Garrick Thomas	M	GL	U	C		P	P: <i>-body</i>			
1720–1779	Gray	M	P	N				P: <i>-body</i>	P	P: past	
1720–1779	Thomas Secker	M	CU	U		C			C		C
1720–1800	Samuel Johnson	M	P	N				P: <i>-body</i>	P		
1720–1800	Roger Newdigate	M	GU	N				P: <i>-one</i>	C		
1740–1779	Theophilus Hughes	M	CL	N		C					C
1740–1800	William Cowper	M	P	N	C			C	C		P
1760–1779	Richard Champion	M	M	N				(C: <i>-man</i> )	P		
1760–1800	Jeremy Bentham	M	P	N					C	P: complex	
1760–1800	Charles Burney	M	P	N	C			P: <i>-one</i>	P		
1760–1800	Samuel Crisp	M	GL	U	C						C
1760–1779	Erasmus Darwin	M	P	N					P		C
1780–1800	Erasmus Darwin	M	P	N					C		C
1760–1800	William Jones	M	GU	U				C	C	P	
1760–1800	Ignatius Sancho	M	O	N	C				P		
1780–1800	William Clift	M	P	U						P	C

\* **Gender:** F = female, M = male. **Rank:** N = nobility, GU = upper gentry, GL = lower gentry, CU = upper clergy, CL = lower clergy, P = professionals, M = merchants, O = other non-gentry. **Social mobility:** U = up, D = down, N = none. **Change:** C = conservative, P = progressive.

Let us next zoom in on the different stages of change. Table 14.2 lists individuals who are outliers in terms of more than one change nearing completion or completed. Most of the outliers are consistently conservative as it was only possible to identify progressive individuals in the case of affirmative *DO*. The only woman on the list, Hester Piozzi, is conservative in terms of her use of *thou* and affirmative *DO*, but she uses them quite differently from the earlier centuries, so she could also be called progressive. This is in line with the oft-repeated observation that women tend to be leaders rather than laggards when it comes to language change. David Garrick, the famous Shakespearean actor, uses *thou* as an intimacy marker, but somewhat surprisingly makes little use of affirmative *DO* in his letters. Three of the conservatives are clergymen: Philip Henry, John Pinney and Francis Blomefield, all in terms of verbal *-s* and indefinite pronouns (see 15.3.3 below for a possible explanation for this). Professionals and gentry are also represented among the outliers. As with the full data set, social mobility does not seem to have an effect among the conservatives here, either.

**Table 14.2** Individuals who are outliers in terms of more than one change nearing completion, sorted by gender and period

Outlier					Change			
Period	Name	Gender	Rank	Social mobility	<i>thou</i>	verbal <i>-s</i>	<i>DO</i>	outgoing indefinites
1760–1800	Hester Piozzi	F	GL	N	C		C	
1680–1699	Daniel Fleming	M	GU	U		C		C
1680–1699	Philip Henry	M	CL	N		C		C
1680–1699	John Pinney	M	CL	?		C		C
1680–1739	Humfrey Wanley	M	P	N			C	C
1720–1759	Francis Blomefield	M	CL	D		C		C
1720–1779	David Garrick	M	GL	U	C		P	
1740–1800	William Cowper	M	P	N	C			C

Table 14.3 shows individuals who are outliers in terms of more than one incipient to mid-range change. Here most of our informants display a mixed profile of conservatism in one change and progressiveness in another, perhaps in part owing to differences in the social meanings of the forms, or how the forms were evaluated by the language users (cf. Nevalainen et al. 2011: 30, 32). For instance, the progressive aspect seems to have been a colloquial feature, whereas *-ity* belonged to a more elevated register, even though it was also increasingly used as a marker of involvement between close friends (see further Chapter 15 below).

**Table 14.3** Individuals who are outliers in terms of more than one incipient to mid-range change, sorted by gender and period

Outlier		Change						
Period	Name	Gender	Rank	Social mobility	incoming indefinites	its	progressive aspect	-ity
1700–1779	Mary Wortley Montagu	F	N	N	P: <i>-body</i>	C		
1720–1800	Elizabeth Carter	F	CL	N	P: <i>-body</i>	P		
1740–1779	Elizabeth Draper	F	P	U		C		P
1760–1800	Frances Burney	F	P	N	P: <i>-one</i>	P		
1760–1800	Sarah Lennox	F	N	N		C	(P: p.pass.)	C
1760–1800	Mary Wollstonecraft	F	P	D		C	P	
1780–1800	Elizabeth Clift	F	O	N	P: <i>-one</i>		P	C
1680–1719	Samuel Pepys	M	P	U	P: <i>-body</i>	C		C
1680–1739	Humphrey Prideaux	M	CU	U	P: <i>-one</i>	P		
1680–1739	Humfrey Wanley	M	P	N		P		C
1700–1719	Henry Liddell	M	GL	N		P		C
1700–1739	Daniel Defoe	M	P	N		C		C
1720–1759	Charles Lennox	M	N	N	P: <i>-body</i>			C
1720–1759	Thomas Pelham-Holles	M	N	N	P: <i>-body</i>			C
1720–1779	Thomas Gray	M	P	N	P: <i>-body</i>	P	P: past	
1720–1779	Thomas Secker	M	CU	U		C		C
1720–1800	Samuel Johnson	M	P	N	P: <i>-body</i>	P		
1720–1800	Roger Newdigate	M	GU	N	P: <i>-one</i>	C		
1740–1800	William Cowper	M	P	N		C		P
1760–1800	Jeremy Bentham	M	P	N		C	P: complex	
1760–1800	Charles Burney	M	P	N	P: <i>-one</i>	P		
1760–1779	Erasmus Darwin	M	P	N		P		C
1780–1800	Erasmus Darwin	M	P	N		C		C
1760–1800	William Jones	M	GU	U		C	P	
1780–1800	William Clift	M	P	U			P	C

However, six individuals (displayed in boldface in Table 14.3) are consistently progressive: poet, translator and writer Elizabeth Carter, writer Frances Burney, dean of Norwich Humphrey Prideaux, poet and literary scholar Thomas Gray, author and lexicographer Samuel Johnson, and musician and author Charles Burney. Carter, the Burneys (daughter and father) and Johnson were contemporaries and moved in the same literary circles in London, whereas Gray was a somewhat more remote literary figure. A social network approach might thus explain some of the progressiveness of Carter, Johnson and the Burneys (cf. Pratt & Denison 2000). As Carter and Johnson were earlier and more central members of the Bluestocking network and the Literary Club (respectively) than the Burneys, this implies that Carter and Johnson would have been more influential in the diffusion of changes as early adopters (e.g. Sairio 2009; Bax 2005; Conde-Silvestre 2012).

While the other professionals favour the indefinites in *-body*, the Burneys prefer *-one*, perhaps as a shared style within the family. All of them favour *its* in addition to the incoming indefinites, and Gray is also an overuser of the past-tense form of the progressive aspect. As with the full data set, none of the consistently progressive users are socially mobile, except for the only non-literary person, Prideaux, who represents an earlier period and is a social aspirer who eventually rose to the rank of upper clergy. His preference for *-one* is in line with the clergy of the time in general, while *its* was preferred in the South, where he spent much of his life.

If we discount Prideaux, the uniting factor behind the consistently progressive individuals thus seems to be a literary profession combined with a relative lack of social mobility. This is also something that distinguishes them from other members of the Bluestocking network included in our corpus who are not consistently progressive in terms of incipient and mid-range changes. For instance, Hester Piozzi belonged to the gentry and married beneath her, and while Mary Wollstonecraft was a professional, she became one through downward mobility, her father having been a gentleman farmer.

On the other hand, three men are or become consistently conservative: author Daniel Defoe and physician Erasmus Darwin, who are professionals, and bishop Thomas Secker, all in terms of *its* and *-ity* (there being no conservatives in the incoming indefinites or progressive aspect). As there are professionals and clergy among the consistently progressive users as well, social rank alone does not explain these results, nor does social mobility. Especially Defoe would rather seem to fit the profile of the consistently progressive individuals, but he is an earlier writer and led quite a different life as a tallow chandler's son and a religious dissenter who spent a considerable amount of time travelling on government business.

Focusing on gender, two of the seven women are consistently progressive, while none are consistently conservative, which points to women's tendency to



lead changes. Moreover, the proportion of progressive women out of all women listed here is greater than the proportion of progressive men out of all men for each change except for *its*, which was indeed led by men for most of the 18th century.

### 14.3 Conclusion

Despite the heterogeneous nature of the changes and the methods used to discover the outliers, some patterns have emerged in the behaviour of conservative and progressive individuals. We have found that most people are not outliers in terms of multiple changes, and when they are, their behaviour may vary from change to change depending on e.g. the stage of the change or the social evaluation of the variants in question. However, we have also discovered some individuals whose outlier status is consistently conservative or progressive. Most of the consistently conservative individuals are men, and clergy are overrepresented among them. The consistently progressive individuals, on the other hand, are most often professionals whose social status remains relatively static, and four of the six individuals who are consistently progressive in terms of incipient and mid-range changes were found to move in the same London literary circles, suggesting a network effect. Perhaps these individuals felt free to experiment with their language use, having less to lose than their upwardly or downwardly mobile peers.